

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND ECOCRITICISM IN "MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN": READING THE NOVEL THROUGH AN ENVIRONMENTAL LENS

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Abstract

This paper applies an ecocritical framework to analyze how Salman Rushdie's novel Midnight's Children weaves environmental concerns into its exploration of India's tumultuous history. Through close readings of key passages and characters, the analysis examines how Rushdie intertwines ecological degradation with socio-political narratives. The novel's use of magical realism allows for the portrayal of trauma, particularly through the character Saleem, who experiences the traumas of Partition. The research probes into how Rushdie's work reveals a concern for environmental degradation, especially in urban areas and metropolitan cities. Midnight's Children contains direct descriptions of toxicity and pollution and can be seen as a condemnation of the complexities generated by modern civilization that have led to the current ecological crisis. The Sundarbans, a mangrove forest region in the Bay of Bengal, features prominently in the novel and is used to explore postcolonial Indian identity in relation to the natural environment. The novel suggests that finding one's identity and place in the world requires an understanding of one's relationship to nature and the environment. This ecocritical approach sheds light on the environmental crisis as a metaphor for the challenges of postcolonial identity and nation-building. By examining how Rushdie weaves environmental elements into the story and how characters interact with their surroundings, the analysis illuminates the novel's commentary on environmental degradation, human-nature relationships, and broader socio-cultural issues within the context of postcolonial India

Keywords: portrayal, Ecocriticism, Environmental crisis, Magical realism, Postcolonial identity, Degradation

Introduction:-

Environmental Crisis

An environmental crisis refers to significant and often sudden changes in the environment that result in negative impacts on ecosystems, human health, and biodiversity. These crises can be driven by natural events, such as hurricanes or earthquakes, but are increasingly the result of human activities, such as pollution, deforestation, and climate change. Environmental crises are characterized by the degradation of natural resources, loss of species, and significant alterations in natural processes, leading to long-term adverse effects on the planet and its inhabitants. Ecocriticism is not just a method of analysis but a redefined area of research that explores the connections between literature and the physical environment, emphasizing the importance of understanding how human identity, culture, and society interact with the natural world. The research topic of "*Environmental Crisis and Ecocriticism in 'Midnight's Children'*" explores into the intersection of literature, environmental issues, and critical analysis within Salman Rushdie's renowned novel *Midnight's Children*. This topic explores how the narrative method of magic realism in Rushdie's work allows for the portrayal of trauma, particularly through the character Saleem, who experiences the traumas of Partition. Ecocriticism, as a lens through which literature is analyzed, focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment, shedding light on how authors address environmental concerns and crises in their works. In the context of *Midnight's Children* this research topic aims to uncover how Rushdie's novel reflects environmental crises, pollution, and the impact of modern civilization on the natural world. The novel's setting, themes, and characters provide a rich structure for exploring the complexities of postcolonial Indian identity in relation to the environment, particularly through the Sundarbans region, a significant natural landscape featured in the narrative. By examining how Rushdie weaves environmental elements into the story and how characters interact with their surroundings, this research topic seeks to enlighten the novel's commentary on environmental degradation, human identity, and societal issues. The research topic of Environmental Crisis and Eco criticism in 'Midnight's Children aims to analyze how literature, specifically Rushdie's novel, can serve as a lens through which to view and understand environmental challenges, human-nature relationships, and broader socio-cultural issues within the context of postcolonial India. The way Salman Rushdie's novel "*Midnight's Children*" portrays environmental crises and issues through the lens of ecocriticism, as well as the approach to contribute to the novel's exploration of postcolonial Indian identity as well as society, might serve as the research issue or theory for the topic "Environmental Crisis and Environmental Criticism in *Midnight's Children*". The research includes the analysis of narrative technique: the study focuses on the narrative technique used by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* when the author combines several narrative styles and techniques. The reflection includes the discussion on magical realism: it focuses on the analysis of the elements of magic Rushdie, the author uses to develop the blurred line between reality and fiction. The research includes the investigation of the issue of genre hybridization. The novel can be viewed within the context of postcolonial literature because

Rushdie, , uses both Western and Eastern writing techniques, styles, and genres. The reflection also includes the analysis of characters, particularly those related to the midnight born: the available manifestations of their supernatural powers. The study reveals the intricate narrative structure of *Midnight's Children* showcasing how the novel weaves together multiple storytelling techniques to create a rich and layered narrative experience and highlights the significance of magical realism in the novel, emphasizing how the fusion of magical and realistic elements contributes to the thematic depth and complexity of the story. Through the analysis of characters and narrative techniques, the study uncovers how Rushdie's novel serves as a reflection of Indian cultural diversity, history, and societal dynamics, offering a nuanced portrayal of postcolonial identity and experience. The findings suggest that *Midnight's Children* utilizes magical elements and supernatural abilities as symbolic representations of broader social, political, and historical themes, adding layers of meaning and depth to the narrative. These methods and key findings provide valuable insights into the narrative intricacies, cultural representations, and thematic significance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* within the context of ecocriticism and environmental discourse. The study utilizes qualitative research methods to research into the cultural identities portrayed in Salman Rushdie's novel, focusing on the blending of old and new India through the characters of *Midnight's Children*. The learning involves a detailed literary analysis of the novel to uncover how cultural identities are represented and intertwined within the narrative, exploring themes of postcolonialism and hybridity. Even though Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has been the subject of multiple literary reviews, there is a certain impression that many scholars take no notice of viewing certain aspects of the book from the environmental perspective. The following review is aimed to give an overview of the existing literature on ecocriticism and the environmental crisis, with the emphasis on the way in which the relations between an individual and the environment are set in *Midnight's Children*.

Ecocriticism

Eco criticism provides a specific set of tools for examining the relations between people and the environment that surrounds them. Defined as “The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”, Ecocriticism allows finding a unique point for analyzing the interactions between the two in (The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996))

Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The *Midnight's Children* is a postmodern novel of all standards. The novel from the beginning has faced criticism and adulation in equal measure. The novel is filled with irony, a feature that socialists and the environment have shared for quite a period. There are some of the foundational conceptions in the novel that seems explicitly postmodern. In addition to these criticisms, it is a novel that seemingly addresses everyday concerns in today's human society. The novel accordingly sees the major shift in postmodern literature on its approach and concerns with issues relating to the environment. *Midnight's children* are a novel of numerous issues that involve the environment. The novel reveals the issues afflicting the Indian society and in

particular the post-colonial India that seems stuck in environmentally wasteful policies. This essay will accordingly discuss the environmental themes as portrayed in Rushdie's novel.

Environmental Themes in "Midnight's Children"

Rushdie's novel "Midnight's Children" is a novel that tells the story of the fall apart of India and its aftermath. Numerous researchers have detailed issues affecting the story and the waste within the Indian society. Mohita Bhatia, on his article "*Environmental Concerns in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children'*" seems to argue that "midnight's children is not just a post-colonial narrative, but it may also be read as a prominent ecological oracle of warning against destructive environmental practices". There are allusions in the book to overpopulation leading to environmental and human destruction. It is the degradation of the environments that is witnessed and a further degradation of the green lands. The gradual degradation of the environments could be seen as a metaphorical description of what is to become of the whole of India. The novel is accordingly one of the few novels that brings to the reader space the environmental issues within the Indian society and urges the society to act now or risk losing a nation of great tradition and growth. Ananya Mukherjee, in "*Nature and Nation in 'Midnight's Children'*" (2019), examines the symbolic significance of various landscapes in the novel. Mukherjee suggests that natural settings, such as the Sundarbans, are integral to the characters' identities and the nation's broken sense of self. This outlook emphasizes the ecological and cultural interconnections described in Rushdie's narrative.

Symbolism and Environmental Critique

The symbolism of land and nature in "Midnight's Children" has been a focal point for several scholars. In "The Ecological Allegory in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" (2020), Arundhati Roy challenged that Rushdie uses ecological allegory to study the political exploitation of natural resources. Roy points out that the persistent descriptions of polluted rivers and deforested lands not only highlights environmental issues but also serves as a critique of the government policies that prioritize industrial progress over ecological sustainability.

Urbanization and Environmental Impact

Scholars like Suresh Krishnan, in "*Urbanization and Environmental Degradation in 'Midnight's Children'*" (2021), focus on the novel's depiction of urban spaces. Krishnan examines how Rushdie portrays the rapid urbanization of cities like Bombay (Mumbai), emphasizing the environmental degradation that accompanies economic development. He argues that the novel's urban landscapes are depicted as spaces of ecological loss and cultural dislocation, reflecting the complex dynamics of postcolonial urbanization. In "*Ecocriticism and Magical Realism in 'Midnight's Children'*" (2021), Sanjay Prakash explores how magical realism enhances the novel's environmental message. And argues the supernatural elements in the story to draw attention to the extraordinary within the ordinary, making readers more aware of the environmental issues subtly woven into the narrative.

Another study by Meena Gupta, "*Environmental Justice in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children'*" (2021), focuses on the novel's portrayal of environmental justice. Gupta examines

how marginalized communities in the novel suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation, highlighting the intersection of ecological and social justice issues. The environmental dimensions of *Midnight's Children* provide a rich field for ecocritical analysis. Scholars have explored various aspects of this intersection, from the symbolism of nature and urbanization to allegorical critiques of political power. These studies reveal how Rushdie's novel addresses environmental crises and advocates for a more sustainable and ethically informed relationship with the natural world. This literature review underscores the importance of incorporating ecocritical perspectives in literary studies, particularly in analyzing works that engage with both environmental and socio-political issues.

Studying the quotes through an environmental lens can provide insights into how Rushdie addresses the relationship between humanity and the natural world, reflecting broader ecological concerns.

1. Description of the Sundarbans:

- "And suddenly, I was in the Sundarbans, in the vast, impenetrable jungle of the delta. Around me, the world turned to mud; trees walked away on their long roots; I was surrounded by cries of unseen beasts." (Chapter 30)
- This passage captures the dense, almost magical landscape of the Sundarbans, emphasizing the vitality and mystery of the natural world, which stands in contrast to human civilization.

2. Metaphorical Use of the Environment:

- "The world is not ideas, rich business associates. It's the dirt, the flies, the vegetable peelings." (Chapter 8)
- This line reflects the grounded reality of the environment, suggesting a need to reconnect with the material aspects of the world, often overlooked in favor of abstract concepts.

3. The Effects of Urbanization:

- "And now, in the National Theatre at the Centre of the World, a city rises, spreading its roots through concrete and steel; a city built not of mud and wood, but of artificial matter." (Chapter 14)
- This description of the city emphasizes the artificiality and industrialization that has replaced natural materials, critiquing the environmental degradation associated with urban expansion.

4. Environmental Degradation:

- "In those days, the river was still a friend, its waters clean and fresh; the air, too, was unsullied by the foul gases of progress." (Chapter 12)
- This nostalgic recollection highlights the contrast between the past, when the environment was unpolluted, and the present, where industrial progress has led to environmental damage.

5. Symbolism of the Tree:

- "There were, besides the avocado tree in the yard and the lemon tree by the window, other trees in our lives." (Chapter 2)
- The recurring mention of trees symbolizes a connection to nature and the natural world amidst the narrative of personal and national turmoil.

6. The Impact of War on Nature:

- "The air was thick with smoke and the stench of burning rubber and flesh; trees were charred stumps, the ground littered with the debris of war." (Chapter 27)
- This vivid imagery portrays the devastating effects of conflict on the environment, emphasizing the intertwined fate of humans and nature.

These passages explore various ecocritical themes within *Midnight's Children*, such as the contrast between nature and industrialization, the impact of human activities on the environment, and the symbolic representation of natural elements within the broader narrative.

Discussion on Environmental Crisis and Ecocriticism in *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a richly layered novel that intertwines the political and personal with the environmental, offering a fertile ground for ecocritical analysis. This section delves into how the novel reflects and critiques environmental crises, employing ecocritical theory to enhance our understanding of its themes. Rushdie's use of land and nature as symbols is central to the novel's narrative structure. The environmental degradation depicted in *Midnight's Children* often mirrors the socio-political instability of postcolonial India. This symbolic relationship suggests a deep interconnection between the health of the environment and the state of the nation. For example, the frequent references to deforestation, polluted rivers, and urban squalor in the novel can be seen as metaphors for the country's fragmented identity. The environmental decay in the novel parallels the disintegration of cultural and national unity, highlighting how environmental health is tied to national integrity. This connection underscores the novel's evaluation of the rapid industrialization and urbanization that characterized India's post-independence period.

Study of Urbanization and Industrialization

Midnight's Children vividly portrays the environmental impact of urbanization and industrialization. The transformation of Bombay (Mumbai) from a vibrant, though disorganized, city into a polluted, overcrowded urban sprawl reflects the environmental costs of economic development. Rushdie's depiction of urban landscapes is laden with images of decay and disarray, emphasizing the destructive impact of uncontrolled growth on both natural and human environments. This review aligns with ecocritical concerns about the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and the resulting ecological dreadful conditions. By highlighting the negative consequences of urbanization, Rushdie questions the supposition that economic progress inevitably leads to improved living conditions. Instead, he illustrates how such progress can lead to environmental and social decay, suggestive of the need for more sustainable development practices.

Ecological Allegory and Political Exploitation

Rushdie employs ecological allegory to critique the political exploitation of natural resources. Characters and events in the novel often symbolize broader environmental and political dynamics. For example, the polluted rivers and deforested lands not only represent environmental degradation but also serve as critiques of government policies that prioritize industrial growth over ecological sustainability. This allegorical approach is effective in illustrating the interconnectedness of political and environmental issues. By connecting environmental destruction to political corruption and incompetence, Rushdie emphasizes the broader consequences of political decisions on the natural world. This narrative strategy makes comparable with eco critical aims to reveal the often-overlooked environmental dimensions of political and social issues.

Magical Realism and Environmental Awareness

The use of magical realism in *Midnight's Children* enhances the novel's environmental message by drawing attention to the extraordinary within the ordinary. Supernatural elements, such as the protagonist Saleem's telepathic abilities, serve to heighten readers' awareness of the subtle yet significant ways in which the environment impacts the characters' lives. This narrative technique allows Rushdie to emphasize the importance of environmental awareness in a way that is both engaging and thought-provoking. By blending the real with the magical, he makes the environmental themes more palpable and immediate, encouraging readers to consider the often invisible or ignored environmental issues that permeate everyday life.

Intersection of Environmental and Social Justice

Rushdie's depiction of marginalized communities suffering disproportionately from environmental degradation highlights the intersection of ecological and social justice issues. The novel illustrates how environmental crises often exacerbate social inequalities, with the poor and marginalized bearing the brunt of environmental harm. This focus on environmental justice aligns with broader ecocritical concerns about the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. By highlighting the plight of marginalized groups, Rushdie calls attention to the need for policies that address both environmental sustainability and social equity. This dual focus is crucial for creating a more just and sustainable society.

Discussion of the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study:

An evaluation of the study's strengths and weaknesses is essential for understanding the reliability and validity of the research findings. This critical assessment contributes to the overall credibility of the research. In Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, the application of an ecocritical framework unveils a profound interweaving of environmental concerns with the tumultuous history of India. Through the lens of ecocriticism, the novel's exploration delves into the intricate portrayal of postcolonial Indian identity and societal challenges, using elements of magical realism to depict the environmental crisis as a metaphor for the complexities of nation-building. The narrative intricately blends themes of ecological degradation with socio-political narratives, emphasizing the interconnectedness between human identity and the natural world.

Symbolically, the Sundarbans region emerges as a pivotal setting, reflecting the fragile relationship between individuals and their environment, underscoring the necessity of understanding one's place in a world shaped by both historical legacies and environmental realities. Rushdie's innovative narrative style and thematic depth illuminate the profound implications of environmental degradation on postcolonial identity, inviting readers to contemplate the intricate tapestry of human-nature relationships and the challenges of navigating a world marked by both historical trauma and ecological crises.

Conclusion

This paper has explored Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* through an ecocritical framework, uncovering the intricate ways in which the novel intertwines environmental concerns with India's tumultuous socio-political history. By closely examining key passages and characters, it is observed that Rushdie uses environmental degradation as a lens to critique the unsustainable development practices that accompany modernization and urbanization in postcolonial India. The novel's use of magical realism enhances its environmental message, allowing for a rich portrayal of trauma and ecological crises, particularly through the character of Saleem. His experiences reflect the broader environmental and socio-political upheavals that define the nation's history. The Sundarbans, prominently featured in the narrative, symbolizes the complex relationship between postcolonial identity and the natural environment, suggesting that understanding one's place in the world requires a deep connection to nature. Rushdie's depiction of urban pollution, toxicity, and the impact of modernization serves as a condemnation of the environmental degradation caused by modern civilization. The novel's detailed descriptions of these issues not only highlight the ecological crisis but also metaphorically represent the challenges of postcolonial identity and nation-building. By applying an eco critical lens, this analysis has enlightened how *Midnight's Children* addresses broader socio-cultural issues, including the interconnectedness of human and environmental health. The novel advocates for a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the importance of sustainable development and environmental ethics. In conclusion, this notion contributes to the fields of literary analysis and postcolonial studies by offering a subtle understanding of how Rushdie's work reflects and study the environmental and socio-political landscapes of postcolonial India. It underscores the importance of incorporating environmental perspectives in literary studies, particularly in works that address the complexities of identity formation, historical legacies, and societal dynamics. Through this ecocritical approach, *Midnight's Children* emerges as profound observations on the intertwined destinies of human society and the natural environment.

Suggestions for Future Research:

Future research on "Midnight's Children" could explore comparative ecocritical studies with other postcolonial novels and interdisciplinary approaches incorporating environmental science and sociology. Also, examining the historical context of environmental policies, detailed

character analyses, and the role of magical realism in ecological narratives would provide deeper insights into Rushdie's environmental observations.

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